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ON
EXTERNALS
IN
RELIGION.
A
SERMON.

By JOHN BROWN, M. A.

Chaplain to the Right Rev. the LORD BISHOP
of Carlisle,

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THE HISTORY OF THE

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EXETERIALS

IN

RELIGION

ST. JOHN'S

BY JOHN BROWN

Chaplain to the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop
of Exeter

On the Use and ABUSE of EXTERNALS
in RELIGION.

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S E R M O N.

By JOHN BROWN, M. A.
Chaplain to the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of CARLISLE.

PREACHED AT THE
CONSECRATION
OF

St JAMES'S Church in WHITEHAVEN,
BY THE RIGHT REVEREND
The LORD BISHOP *of* CARLISLE.

Printed for C. DAVIS in HOLBORN. 1753.

Price SIX - PENCE.

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T O
Sir JAMES LOWTHER, *Bart.*
of WHITEHAVEN,

AND THE REST OF THE
S U B S C R I B E R S
T O T H E

Building St *J A M E S*'s Church,

THIS DISCOURSE,

PUBLISHED

At the general Desire of the Congregation,

Is, with all due Respect, inscribed by

The PREACHER.

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TO
ST. JAMES LOWTHER BAY.

OF WHITHAM AVE.

AND THE REST OF THE

SUBSCRIBERS

TO THE

Building St. James's Church,

THIS DISCOURSE,

PUBLISHED

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It, with all due Respect, is solicited by

THE PREACHER.



SIR JOHN, Chap. iv. Ver. 23.

*But the Hour cometh, and now is, when the
true Worshipers shall worship the Father in
Spirit and in Truth.*

THE great Force of Religion on
the Minds and Morals of Man-
kind, hath been so generally
acknowledged, that in all Ages
and Countries of the known
World, it hath ever been made a Part of the
publick Concerns of State, to encourage and
protect it. Yet, to the Disgrace of human
Nature, we must confess, that the Institutions
of Religion have been too generally abused;
insomuch that some have made it a Question,
whether the Mischiefs it hath occasioned, put
into the Scale of Reason, would not out-
weigh the Good it hath produced. Tho' it
would bring no Disgrace on true Religion, to

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acknowledge the Mischiefs of false Zeal in their full Extent; yet I do not think the Assertion true: It seems to have arisen from those Impressions to which the human Imagination is subject, when it takes not Reason for its Guide. The mischievous Effects of false Zeal have generally been publick and notorious, breaking forth into Wars, and the Subversion of Empires: on the contrary, the good Effects of true Religion have been, and still must be, of a permanent and silent Nature; working effectually, but secretly, on the human Heart; and infusing themselves by gentle Degrees thro' all the Faculties of the Soul. Here then we plainly see the Reason, why the mischievous Effects of false Religion may seem to overbalance the good Effects of true: Every Eye gazes with Wonder on the Storm, that levels Towers and Forests, and sweeps away the Labours of Mankind; while the Dews of Heaven fall unnoticed by the common Eye; tho' by their silent Influence they crown the Harvest with Plenty, and make the Vallies to laugh and sing.

YET great, no doubt, and terrible have been the Mischiefs of mistaken Zeal: of Zeal, con-
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tending not only about Doctrines, but Places and Modes of Worship. About Things designed and instituted for the Ends of Peace; but perverted by Superstition to the Purposes of Discord. Our blessed Saviour, knowing what was in Man, seems, in the Passage here cited from the Gospel, to have intended a total Prevention of this persecuting Spirit; by declaring that neither particular Place nor Mode of Worship would be of any intrinsic Value under the Christian Dispensation: that the local and peculiar Ceremonies of Judaism, were to give Way to a Religion of a more exalted Nature; that the Hour was now come, when the true Worshipers should worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth.—Not with the painful Rites and Ceremonies required by the Law, which only shadowed that which Christ perform'd; but with that more sublime and spiritual Worship which should suit the Genius of Christianity.—*For the Father, saith he, seeketh such to worship him.*

T H A T this is the Import of the Words, will appear, by considering the Context: The Explanation of which, will at the same Time discover to us the Reason of this seeming Mu-

tability in the Will of God; who deals not with his Creatures according to the absurd Rigour of the Law of the *Medes* and *Persians*, which altereth not: but while himself sits enthron'd in the Glories of unchangeable Wisdom, condescends to the Weakness of his Creatures, and adapts his various Laws to their various Situation and Capacity.

At the Time of the Migration of the Jews from *Egypt*, the whole World was sunk in Idolatry. They alone were blessed with the Knowledge of the true God. Yet even they were perpetually relapsing into the Absurdities of Idol-worship. Hence that Load of peculiar Ceremonies was imposed on them; all tending by various Means to one great End; that of keeping them pure from Idolatry, of separating them from the Worship of the Pagan Nations that surrounded them, and confirming them in that of the true God. To this End the Temple was built, and the Worship established at *Jerusalem*: hither the whole Nation was obliged to resort at stated Times, to prevent their Relapse into Idolatry.

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THE *Samaritans* were a Sect who had divided from the Jews; and for the same Ends had built a Temple on Mount *Gerizim*; where *they* likewise periodically perform'd the Ceremonies enjoined by the Law.

THESE Ceremonies, and this Separation of the Jews from the Gentiles, were designed by Providence to be continued till the Coming of Christ. But now a glorious Change was to take Place. The World was now prepared, by higher Degrees of Knowledge, for the Reception of the Gospel. This was the Hour appointed for the Sun of Righteousness to rise, for his Light to be spread over the Face of the whole Earth. Every Circumstance and Ceremony was now to be done away, that tended to keep up the former *Separation*; nothing to be established, save what tended to a general *Union* of Mankind: and the peculiar, the local, and periodical Worship of *Jerusalem*, to be swallowed up in that more spiritual Dispensation, which was designed to produce universal Peace and Charity.—And now we shall only need to repeat the Passage before us, in order to discover at
once

once its Meaning and Propriety. The Woman of *Samaria*, desirous of Information, says to Jesus, "Our Fathers worshiped in this Mountain; and ye say, that in *Jerusalem* is the Place where Men ought to worship, Jesus said unto her, Woman, believe me, the Hour cometh when ye shall neither in this Mountain, nor at *Jerusalem*, worship the Father.—The Hour cometh, and now is, when the true Worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

BUT as, in avoiding one Extreme, it hath too generally been the Fate of Mankind to fly to its Opposite; so here, this Declaration, which implies only the Abolition of the ceremonial Law, and the Establishment of a more pure and spiritual Worship, hath frequently been misinterpreted into an express Command against all external Ceremonies and publick Religion. [Not only unletter'd Enthusiasts have often fallen into this Extreme; but we have heard one of Reputation and Abilities declare, that Christianity is "no more than a kind of divine Philosophy existing in the Mind,"]

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AND indeed were Men in the Condition of Angels, this might, for ought we know, be true: but while we are in our present, more imperfect, and embody'd State, it will be found necessary, on impartial Enquiry, to call in *Externals* to our Aid, if we would indeed accomplish that great *Purpose*, of worshiping God in Spirit and in Truth. Let us therefore proceed to the Proof of this: and from this Proof will evidently appear the Efficacy, the Necessity of publick Religion, and the Reasonableness of this Day's Solemnity.

1st. THEREFORE, the publick Institutions of Religion are necessary; because without publick Religion, Mankind in general would relapse into a State of Barbarism, and a total Forgetfulness of all Religion. I believe, it is no Breach of Truth or Charity to affirm, that a great Part of Mankind are so deeply immersed in Business or Pleasure, that they seldom turn their Thoughts to God, seldom recollect either their Obligations to him, or their Dependance on him, save only when they are drawn by the stated Returns of publick Worship. Some indeed are so harden'd
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and unhappy, as to be Proof against every Call: But much greater Numbers are sway'd by the arbitrary Power of Custom; and yield to the Rules of *Decency*, when they would scorn those of *Duty*. Now among this Number, there are none perhaps who receive not at least some temporary Impressions of Religion; which tho' they work not their entire and full Effect, tho' they be soon choaked by the Cares and Pleasures of the World, yet keep those Cares and Pleasures at a Stand, and prevent them from swallowing up the Soul in a total Degeneracy. Others there are, no Doubt, who by their Appearance here, are happily surprized into a Sense of Piety and Religion; whose callous Hearts are soften'd and prepared for the Impressions of divine Grace, by the Solemnity of publick Worship; who come deaf to every Call but that of Decency and Custom; but depart with a better Sense of Things upon their Mind, roused from their Lethargy of Soul, to listen to the warning Voice, which bids them return to the right Way, and walk in it.

2dly. EVEN among those who in their private Devotions are most sincere; external

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Acts and Ceremonies, when properly conducted, become real Assistances. There is that strong and mutual Connexion between the Body and the Soul; between the Senses and Imagination, the Passions and the Reason of Mankind, that they uniformly act and re-act upon each other; and, by this mutual Rebound, work Effects which to a common Eye may seem almost miraculous. Is it not a general and a just Complaint, that the Mind of Man is drawn forcibly down from the Contemplation of divine Things, by the Allurements of the outward Senses? What Lessons of Morality have been given on this important Topick? How often and how powerfully have Mankind been exhorted to avoid every inviting Temptation of Sight and Hearing; because these, working on the Imaginations and Passions of Mankind, do inevitably sink the Soul in every sensual Excess? Now so it hath happened, that many of these pious Moralists, not penetrating into the full Extent of the human Frame, have branded the Senses and Imagination, as the natural Enemies of all Virtue: forgetting that, by a proper Application, they might be enlisted in her Service; and happily converted into natural

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tural Instruments of the noblest Purposes of Religion. For as many Objects of Sense tend to debase the Mind, so there are others which no less tend to exalt it. Hence indifferent Things gain their Efficacy: For as the Soul, in common Life, is too generally drawn down by earthly Objects; so, it is the Province of publick Religion to counterwork their Operations, and elevate the Mind to the Contemplation of divine Things, by external and solemn Institutions. Thus, the appointed Times of Worship will naturally put us in Mind of the Importance of that Work we are called to: The Grandeur, awful Silence, and Solemnity of the House of God, when we enter into it, will naturally awaken those Impressions of Love and Gratitude, those Sentiments of Humility and Submission, which are the proper Foundations of unfeigned Devotion. The humble Posture of kneeling in Prayer,—of standing up with a more assured Reverence when we praise our Maker,—the giving Voice and Accent both to our Prayers and Praises,—all these, as they are the natural Efforts of the Soul working on the Body; so, by a Rebound on the Imagination, they raise the Soul to new and higher Degrees of Fervour, tending

ing to fix more warm and lasting Impressions of Devotion and Virtue on the Heart.

3^{dly}. BESIDES these great Effects, we must not forget the powerful Influence of Example in the Publick Worship of God. By Example I mean not only that which works by Shame or Emulation, nor that which awakens cool Reflection in the Mind, by both which Religion and Piety are indeed often promoted: But I mean that Sympathy of Soul so strongly prevalent in human Nature, which like Fire among combustible Matter, immediately runs thro' the Mass, converting the whole into its own Likeness. The Passions are contagious. Fear, Hope, Grief, Joy, Exultation, and Rapture, shining forth in the Countenance of our Fellow-creatures, strike themselves into our Hearts, and awaken correspondent Feelings in the Soul. Thus the Sight of a Congregation seriously united in Worship, does naturally inspire additional Degrees of Piety and Reverence. Every Individual at once gives and receives new Fervours of Devotion: a Devotion far more animated than can easily be raised in the Retirement

tirement of the Closet. We become more ardent in Prayer; more attentive in hearing: and when the Voices of the Congregation join with the Instrument of divine Praise, and the Powers of Harmony, our Hearts are doubly warmed with Gratitude, and then indeed do we worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness.

4thly. Tho' each of these Effects, when separately considered, are of great Weight; yet when united, they receive still higher Degrees of Usefulness and Efficacy, especially when enforced by the Power of Custom. Those Places, Actions, Ceremonies, Postures, Forms of Worship, to which we have been long accustomed, and to which we have habitually joined the Ideas of Reverence, Piety, Sanctity, Gratitude, and Devotion, these, I say, will always affect us in the most warm and effectual Manner. This arises from a Quality in the Soul, called in the Language of Philosophers, *the Power of Association*; by which the Imagination by repeated Acts joins Things together, which in themselves are separate: but I chuse rather to call it

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it by the more intelligible Name of Custom. Thro' this frequent Repetition therefore, every accustomed Place and Form of Worship works a stronger Effect on the Soul ; in Comparison of which, any new adopted Form appears dead and powerless. To those, the Imagination more forcibly joins the Ideas of Reverence and Sanctity ; and is thence more effectually stirred up to a Fervency of Devotion.

AND now, shall I need to explain to you the Propriety and Reasonableness of this Day's Solemnity? Its Design is, " By a legal, solemn, and publick Act, to separate this Place from common Uses, and consecrate it to the publick Worship of Almighty God." Not that we can bring down or confine the Immensity of the Godhead to the narrow Circuit of these Walls ; that God, who dwelleth not in Temples made with Hands, whom even the mighty Temple of the Universe, the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain ! But by this peculiar and solemn Destination, it is naturally fitted to strike the human Mind with additional Degrees of Awe
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and Reverence. This Fact hath been so universally acknowledged, that all Ages and Nations, according to their Apprehensions of Religion, have concurred in the Practice of Consecration. Yet the true Reason hath not always been apprehended : It hath often been practised on superstitious Motives. But the Practice, as *here* explained, and *here performed*, is not the Effect of a weak Superstition, as hath been blindly suggested of late by some, who neither understood human Nature nor themselves. It is the natural and genuine Result from the Constitution of the human Frame : which, as it always annexes the Ideas of Horror and Detestation to those Places where any notorious and execrable Act of Wickedness hath been committed ; so it naturally joins the Impressions of Reverence and devout Respect to those which have been solemnly dedicated to Religion and Virtue. Let us appeal therefore to Experience. Would any Man chuse for the Place of his Devotions a Dungeon, the Habitation of Criminals, or a Den, the Receptacle of Thieves and Robbers ? Would he chuse to purify his Mind in the Places where the impure and polluted Scenes of Drunk-

Drunkenness, Lewdness, and Debauchery are daily acted? Would not the Consciousness of these Abominations strike upon his Soul, mix itself with every exalted and heavenly Contemplation, and like a muddy Stream falling into clear Waters, debase and contaminate their native Purity? Now in a Place set apart by solemn Destination to divine Worship, an Effect the very Reverse of this takes Place. Every Object that presents itself, brings along with it some Idea, some Image, some awakening Circumstance of Sanctity or Virtue. As these flow in, the Soul divests itself of every turbulent and unquiet Passion: Debauchery and Prophaneness are check'd in their Career; Hypocrisy relents; Cruelty stands subdued; and Revenge, for a-while, forgets its Nature. The Soul, thus cleansed from its vicious Inclinations, becomes prepared for the Reception of every heavenly Influence. That God, to whom this sacred Place is now dedicated, tho' every where and at all Times present, becomes here more intimately present to the Mind. Here the Love of a Saviour, by frequent and solemn Commemoration, becomes the natural Object of our Meditations
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and Gratitude. Here we more warmly acknowledge, and by that Acknowledgement acquire still higher Portions of the divine Spirit of Grace. Here the Virtues of Faith and Hope, Meekness and Forgiveness, Good-will and Charity, like so many Messengers from Heaven sent down to conduct us thither, meet us at our Entrance; infusing into our Hearts Peace and Joy, such as the World cannot give. In a Word, every Object that we see or hear, works a strong Effect on the human Frame; and conspires to elevate the Soul, from the Love of earthly Things, to the Fruition of God and Virtue. Such then is the Nature and Reasonableness of this Day's Solemnity. A Solemnity adapted to the Frame and Capacities of Man. *Angels*, perhaps, need not stoop to it: *Brutes* cannot rise to it. But the Man who feels not its Influence, must be either *Angel* or *Brute*; must be *above* or *below* the Condition of Humanity.

IN Consequence of these Truths, give me now Leave to add some few Observations.

1st. HAVING thus fixed the Nature and End of external Institutions, and shewn that they are only the proper and appointed Means of worshiping God more effectually in Spirit and in Truth, we shall now easily discover the dangerous Effects of thinking too highly of them. From this Extreme hath arisen the Folly of vowing long and tedious Pilgrimages, as a Thing meritorious in the Sight of God. A Journey to *Mecca* is almost the one Thing necessary in the *Mahometan* Religion: A Voyage to *Jerusalem* was no less so, in the dark and superstitious Ages of Christianity. A Pilgrimage to *Loretto* is still a Matter of Importance within the Circuit of the Roman Church. All these seem to be absurd and groundless Imitations of the periodical Worship at the Temple of *Jerusalem*: For which indeed there was a substantial Reason, as explained above; but which ceased to exist on the Establishment of Christianity. Yet, in Spite of our Saviour's preventing Admonition, the most distant Inhabitants of *Europe* must needs worship the Father at *Jerusalem*: The Effects of this absurd Imitation were such

as might naturally be expected. The Pilgrimage, having no rational End, was itself raised into the Catalogue of meritorious Actions; and, with the common Pride and Insolence of Usurpers, expelled those real Virtues which ought ever to reign in the human Heart. Purity of Manners was banished, to make Way for Licentiousness; and persecuting Zeal supplanted Christian Charity. The Pilgrimage or Crusade attoned for all: In Proof of which I need only refer you to the History of those vagrant Times. This, indeed, is the natural Consequence of over-rating the Externals of Religion. For where positive Institutions are mistaken for real Virtues; and rested in, not as Means but as Ends, they will ever be laid hold of by self-deceiving Men, as an Attonement for the Guilt of indulged Appetites: Thus outward Pomp takes Place of inward Piety; and the idle Fopperies of an unmeaning Devotion are made sacred at the Expence of true Holiness and Virtue. This Extreme is no less destructive to Charity than common Morals. Hence hath often flowed that Bitterness of Spirit among religious Sects; for, mistaking the true End of their respective Institutions,

stitutions, either thro' Ignorance or Pride, and giving the Sanction of the divine Authority to their own Establishments, they have not failed to brand each other with the most odious Names; and conduct themselves with such mutual Hatred and Uncharitableness, as became a Reproach to that Religion they professed.

2dly. As many have erred in thinking too highly of the Externals of Religion; so others have erred, in too lightly regarding them: This hath happened, sometimes out of a Spirit of Contempt, and sometimes from misguided Caution. There is a certain Spirit of Contempt, generally prevalent among those who would aspire to the Character of Philosophers, without the Drudgery of Thinking. Among these Men (which, we know, abound in the present, and probably have abounded in every Age) external Institution of every Kind passeth for a Thing of nought. They despise the Outworks of Society, alike in Politicks and Religion. Yet they might do well to consider, that Things in themselves indifferent may, by mutual Consent, as we have
seen,

seen, become the natural Means of advancing pure Religion. They might do well to consider, that altho' these particular Means are nowhere prescribed; yet, that whoever so lightly accounts of these Institutions, as to despise, neglect, or violate them, does indeed and virtually transgress the Laws of God; because, he obstructs that which is the End of every divine Command, the common Happiness of Mankind.—With Regard to those that have erred in this Extreme from a Principle of misguided Caution, it needs only be observed, that they form to themselves a wrong Idea of themselves and human Nature. That spiritual Devotion does by no Means exclude bodily Worship: That, on the contrary, the one is necessarily heightened by the other, thro' the strict Union of Soul with Body. That they are vainly attempting to reverse the Order of Providence, and labouring to raise themselves from their embodied State, to that of pure Intellect, before the appointed Time: that by this they rob themselves of those real Advantages which the God of Nature hath ordained, while they refuse to call in the Senses and Imagination, as the natural Aids of true and spiritual Worship.

3dly. WE may here observe and admire the Wisdom and Excellence of Christianity, in not appointing its Profelytes the Observance of any particular Form of Rites or Ceremonies. The Jewish Ceremonial Law being appropriated to the Use of one People, assembled in one Place, tending only to the Purpose of a temporary Separation, had in these Respects its relative Propriety and Excellence. On the contrary, the Christian Religion, being destin'd for the Service of all Mankind, of every Age and Nation, near and remote, civilized and barbarous; hath, with equal Wisdom, left the Institution of external Ceremonies to the Consent and various Circumstances of different Times and Nations. Thus every Country has the Power of suiting them to the Climate, Customs, Tempers, and Manners of its People. Whereas, had they been delineated and prescribed with the Rigour of a local Religion, they must often have clashed with the prevailing Manners of a Nation, and greatly obstructed the Completion of Christianity.

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4thly. FROM the Principles laid down above, we may draw a powerful Argument in favour of mutual Forbearance and Moderation among religious Sects. We have seen that the Forms of religious Worship derive a Part of their Force from Custom. That those Places, Actions, Postures, Forms, and Ceremonies, to which the Mind hath been accustomed, and to which it hath habitually joined the Ideas of Reverence and Devotion, will always have a stronger Effect, than they can possibly work on him who is yet a Stranger to them. Every religious Sect, therefore, must ever view its own peculiar Institutions in a more advantageous Light, than any other can possibly behold them. Habit gives them an additional Force and Efficacy, which none, who have not been subject to that Habit, can possibly comprehend. It throws a kind of Radiance or Glory round them; giving them the Lustre of something sacred and divine. Were this honest and laudable Partiality rightly apprehended and considered, and as duly moderated as it is natural and strong, it would
surely

surely tend to soften those mutual Expressions of Contempt and Hatred, so freely bestowed on each other by religious Parties. It is a Partiality natural to us as Men ; highly laudable, so far as it heightens our own Devotions ; but deserves the severest Reproofs, when it presumes to intrude upon the Devotions of our Neighbour.

5thly. THEREFORE, instead of judging uncharitably of others, let us rather take Heed, that in the Exercise of our own most excellent Institutions, we conduct ourselves in that decent and becoming Manner, as may raise our Souls to the true and spiritual Worship recommended by our Saviour. So far as Parties concerned may be allowed to judge, we have the strongest Reasons to believe, that no Forms of Worship hitherto established among Men, can better answer these great Purposes than our own. That none excel them in united Dignity, Simplicity, Solemnity, and Power. Notwithstanding this, if they be negligently or absurdly conducted, they at once lose their Nature and Efficacy ;
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for external Forms being addressed to the Senses, their whole Force lies in a becoming Conduct of them. If therefore the Ministers of the Word betray any Indecency, either of Meanness or Foppery, in Habit, Speech or Gesture—if they prefer the Petitions of the Congregation, or read, or preach, in an indolent and lifeless Manner—or if, in the opposite Extreme, they affect an idle Display of their own Abilities or Eloquence, instead of those unaffected Strains which command the Reason, and warm the Heart—if the Congregation assembled shall forget the Ends of their coming—if instead of Reverence and Devotion they discover Indifference and Inattention—if instead of those decent Comportures of Body prescribed by the Church, they indulge themselves in all the Variety of lazy Postures—or turn this sacred Place into a Scene of untimely Mirth and Wantonness.— If these Things, I say, be done, What, in the Name of God, what shall we be bettered by our most excellent Institutions?—In Truth, they cease to be good, when they are ill administered, or ill attended to. And the most de-

defective Forms of Worship, when seriously and solemnly performed, are of more Value in the Sight of God, than the most perfect, when abused or neglected.

Lastly. LET us, above all, take Care that our devout Exercises may have their proper Effect on our Lives and Actions. Without this, our strictest Observance of them, either in publick or in private, is vain, and even an Abomination in the Sight of God. Their Design, we have seen, is for the Improvement of our Minds in Piety and Virtue: If they have not these Effects upon us, it were even scandalous to boast that we enjoy the Benefit of them. By this, we stand self-condemned; and avow ourselves wicked, in spite of the best Assistances. Peace and Piety, and Virtue, are the Ends of all Religion; and our Saviour's Declaration authorizeth us to affirm, that one Form of Worship can only be preferred to another, as it contributes more to these great Ends. Let the Excellence of ours, therefore, shine out in its Effects: so shall Men know it by its Fruits. As we have the best Assistances, so let us make the

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best Use of them. This will, indeed, be no imaginary Distinction. It is a noble Pre-eminence, to be the first in Virtue. So shall we truly become, above all others, *God's peculiar People*, when above all others we become *zealous of good Works*.

F I N I S

